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AUTHOR Hawke, Sharryl
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ABSTRACT

Social studies teachers in Liverpool, New York, furnish their students with significant cultural experiences by a strategy called total immersion day. Two middle schools organized this experience by having grade six students examine a particular area, its geography, history, culture, and politics. The culminating activity of the study unit, an activity day, is designed to allow investigation of all aspects of the culture studied -- the politics, work, food, and fun. A six to eight week study unit for the sixth grade classes provides the geographic overview, historical summary and information on social, economic and political organization of an area such as the Middle East, incorporating current events from newspapers and magazines. Each sixth grader is required to complete a special project which is graded and displayed on immersion day. Costumes representative of the chosen culture are judged, along with typical food prepared for a bazaar. Immersion day itself involves a composite of academic and fun activities, classroom and media presentations. Each student completes a questionnaire evaluating immersion day. Preparatory work and the new experiences of immersion day foster appreciation of a different way of life and insight into a foreign culture for teachers and students involved. (Author/KSM)

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SHARRYL HAWKE
Writer
ERIC/ChESS

PROFILES OF PROMISE are descriptive brochures that highlight innovative social studies and social education practices, which teachers and administrators can easily adapt to their own classrooms or schools.

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A TOTAL IMMERSION DAY

The ideal way to study a foreign land and the culture of its people is to travel in the country, but few schools can provide foreign travel experience for their students. However, social studies teachers in the Liverpool School District, Liverpool, New York, feel they are furnishing their students with some significant cultural experiences without leaving the city limits. Their strategy is called "total immersion days," and the purpose is to enable students to experience, as nearly as possible, a culture other than their own.

For several weeks before an immersion day, students study a particular area, examining its geography, history, culture, and politics. Then, to bring the studies to life, an immersion day is held as the culminating activity of the study unit. Throughout the day students experience aspects of the culture which they have studied--the politics, the work, the food, the fun. The activities are designed to help students gain new insight into and appreciation of the culture.

Though initiated and organized by the social studies teachers in Liverpool schools, the total immersion days have become an interdisciplinary effort involving almost the entire school. Teachers in all subject areas prepare lessons which relate to the culture being studied. Resource teachers, such as art, music, and industrial arts, help students prepare projects and programs. Older students sometimes teach skills they learned in previous immersion days. Principals and counselors serve as judges for contests.

This year two Liverpool schools, Morgan Road Middle School and Liverpool Middle School, held immersion days on the same day and featured the same culture--the Middle East. There were many similarities in the days, but there were also some important differences which demonstrate the adaptability of the immersion day concept.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Both Liverpool Middle School and Morgan Road School held immersion days before this year. This was Liverpool's third year to have an immersion day, and each year the Middle East has been featured. Liverpool teachers chose the Middle East in the past, because they felt it was the culture about which students knew least. With the political events of fall 1973, a better understanding of the Middle East seemed even more important.

Morgan Road held an immersion day last year which featured the Russian culture. This year, because of the prominence of the Middle East in world news, they decided to use this area once again as their feature culture. Both schools had to rearrange their course outlines early in the year to study the Middle East, but the timeliness of the topic seemed to warrant the change.

Immersion days in the Liverpool district schools have always been held for sixth graders. Teachers explain that sixth graders are the youngest students in the middle schools and as such have fewer opportunities for special activities. Also children of this age have natural enthusiasm for such events, and little motivation is needed to get them involved. This year, over 300 Morgan Road students participated in the Middle East Day under the direction of their social studies teachers, Sheila Ehles, Robert Hilliard, and Ronald Newberg. Liverpool's 260 sixth graders were directed by Nancy Arenson, Barbara Moloney, and Anne Schnieder.

In the past, immersion "day" has sometimes been extended to two consecutive days, but both schools decided to limit their activities to one day this year. Not only are the logistics of a two-day program difficult to arrange because of the need for changes in scheduling and use of building space, but also teachers feel that student enthusiasm seems to wane in the second day of activities.

STUDY PREPARATION

Six to eight weeks before the Middle East Day was held, students in each school began a unit of study on the Middle East. Following the syllabus recommended by the state of New York, the students were encouraged to study the Middle East as a region, not as many separate countries. The emphasis was on how the people of the region live and why they live that way. The general outline of what was taught to the sixth graders is as follows:

A. Geographic Overview
   1. Basic topographic features of the land
   2. Importance of water to the region
   3. Climatic conditions

B. Historical Summary
   1. Some of the earliest civilizations developed in the Middle East region
   2. Early unification of the area's peoples produced a strong civilization
   3. Several factors caused the eventual decline of the Middle East strength
   4. The Arab world did not play a strong role in modern world history
   5. Establishment of Israel caused much dissension
   6. The present tendency is to try to reunite the Arab world

C. Social Organization
   1. Family groups are large
   2. Much difference between urban and rural populations
   3. Islamic religion is important to Arab world
   4. Jewish religion is important to Israel

D. Economic Organization
   1. Economy has been agriculturally based
   2. Discovery of oil has given Arab world new strength

E. Political Organization
   1. Most Arab governments are nominally republics but are actually run by "strong men"
   2. Israel is a true democracy

While the above outline was being followed, teachers also incorporated as much current event information as possible. Articles from newspapers and news magazines were used to study the daily changing events in the Middle Eastern situation and the oil embargo. Students were encouraged to learn the names of the people and countries in the news and the conflicting points of view that were being expressed. Morgan Road teachers found political cartoons useful in helping students understand the political situation.

GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

Every sixth grader at Morgan Road and at Liverpool was required to complete a special project for Middle East Day. The projects were not only important learning experiences but also assured that all students made a specific contribution to the day. About a month before the day was held, students were given a list of possible individual and group projects, from which each made his selection. The following project suggestions are from Liverpool and are similar to the projects undertaken at Morgan Road:

Individual Projects
1. Make a chart showing the alphabet of a Middle East country. Show us how to spell and say a few words. Some very interesting examples would be Hebrew, Arabic, or Persian languages. Make your chart on a cloth scroll or clay tablet to look more authentic.
2. Make a hat of the type worn by Moslems--fez, veil, turban. What does this type of hat indicate in the Middle East?
3. Make a model of a mummy. Explain why people were "mummified" by the Egyptians in ancient times.
4. From clay or papier mâche make an example of Egyptian pottery. Make sure that it is decorated in a similar way.
5. Make believe you are an Arab guerrilla or an Israeli ambassador. Write a week's diary for one of these characters. You may also do some illustrations.

Group Projects
1. Make a model of an ancient city.
2. Make a large map showing the border changes in the Middle East since the "Six Day War" and since the present war. What land is now occupied by the Israelis? At what points are there still battles or invasions? Your report should briefly explain the "Six Day War" and tell what, why, and how it happened.

Projects were finished before Middle East Day so they could be put on display for other students to view. Teachers graded the projects, and the grades were an important part of the final evaluations for the unit. Newberg suggests that because sixth graders have not had much experience in doing independent research and activities, teachers should keep a close check on their progress. However, he feels the independent experience is valuable and believes that most students get great satisfaction from seeing their projects completed and on display.

In addition to their projects, students had other responsibilities. All the sixth graders wore costumes representative of Middle Eastern culture on immersion day; students researched the clothing styles of the various countries, decided what they would wear, and assembled their costumes. No rented costumes were allowed to be judged. Students were also asked to bring recipes for making food typical to the Middle East so other students could prepare

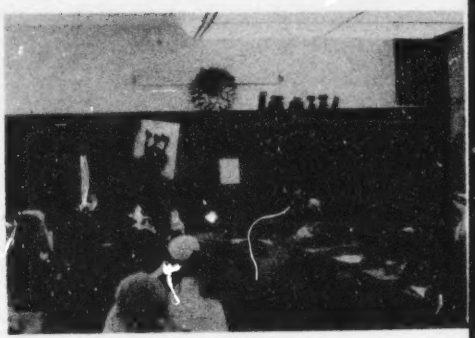
Viewing student projects.

Playing "To Tell the Truth."

Dancing native folk dances.

Studying mummification.

Sampling food in the bazaar.



Learning Hebrew.

these foods for the bazaar. And there was also work to be done to prepare for parts in plays, game shows, documentaries--all the events that took place on immersion day.

To help parents understand the activities of their children, Liverpool sent a letter home explaining the idea of Middle East Day and some of the responsibilities of the students. There was enthusiastic cooperation from parents in both schools for the immersion day.

Morgan Road students put out two special edition newspapers to build interest in immersion day. *The Sheik Speaks* came out prior to Middle East Day, gave the schedule of events, and explained some of the activities that would be happening. Individual students wrote short reports on aspects of Middle Eastern culture such as Middle Eastern sports. A second newspaper, *Looking East*, given to students on Middle East Day, dealt with current Middle East events; editorials were written expressing both the Israeli and Arab points of view on the political situation.

An effort was made to get every student actively involved in Middle East Day. Naturally three social studies teachers could not provide all the assistance and attention that was necessary to make sure that every student had an opportunity to participate and fulfill his responsibilities. Other teachers in both schools were most cooperative in preparing for the day. Not only did they plan special activities for their own classes on Middle East Day, but they also assisted students with their individual projects and assisted the social studies teachers in group activities such as producing a play, filming a documentary, and decorating classrooms. Before Middle East Day arrived most of the faculty had become involved in some way.

MIDDLE EAST DAY

The arrival of veiled women, Arab sheiks, and Israeli soldiers--all students in costume of course--set the tone for the immersion day. From the first until the last bell of the day, students participated in activities with a Middle Eastern focus.

In each school students attended several of their regular classes, but the subject matter on this day related to Middle Eastern life. In math classes students studied computation systems used by various ancient civilizations. Students learned the meaning of enough symbols of Hindu-Arabic and Egyptian numerals to do some problems using the systems. Mummification was the topic in science classes; students heard reports and saw demonstrations on the art of preserving the dead.

At Liverpool, English classes were devoted to a brief study of the Hebrew language and even "Arab sheiks" learned enough Hebrew characters to write a few words. At Morgan Road the English teachers used words relating to the Middle East as the basis of their spelling and vocabulary study, and students read a short version of *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* as preparation for the movie shown in the afternoon. Gym class became folk dancing time as students practiced dances native to both Arab and Israeli cultures.

Social studies classes at Liverpool played a lively version of the television game, "To Tell the Truth." In this instance all students prepared ahead of time to impersonate two prominent figures in the current Middle Eastern scene, persons such as King Faisal and Golda Meir. Using a set of questions prepared by the teachers, students researched the backgrounds and political affiliations of these people so they could accurately express each person's point of view when questioned by a panel of students.

A joint effort by a social studies class and an English class at Morgan Road resulted in a video-taped documentary which was shown to all the sixth grade students in the afternoon. The purpose of the documentary was to examine the events leading up to and following the outbreak of the 1973 conflict between Israel and the Arab countries. The format was like that of a network television presentation with reports from student commentators on aspects of the political situation and an interview with Henry Kissinger, who was played by a student. The presentation was highlighted by a mock debate among students representing United Nations ambassadors from Syria, Egypt, and Israel. The debate became emotional and heated showing the deep-rooted problems involved in the Middle Eastern situation.

Students were responsible for producing the documentary. Some students researched the issues and wrote the script; other class members took care of the technical aspects of staging and filming the production. Ehles reports that the nation's pro-Israel bias seemed to show up in preparing for the mock United Nations debate. The children had little trouble explaining the Israeli position, but said Ehles, "they had a little more trouble acting out what the Syrian ambassador would say."

Both schools exposed the students to a sampling of Arabian folklore. Liverpool showed the movie *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* to the students. Morgan Road students presented the play *Aladdan and His Wonderful Lamp* for other sixth graders, parents, and guests.

Probably the highlight of Middle East Day for most youngsters was the bazaar held in each school. The bazaars took place in large areas, the cafeteria or auditorium, which had been decorated in the mode of the day, with native music playing in the background. Student projects were on display for the students to view and rate, with prizes awarded the winners.

And there was native food to be sampled. Students had opportunity to taste such delicacies as couscous (grain dish), Oznei Haman (cookies), Khorbz Araby (Arab bread), Challah (Israeli bread), and Syrian custard. The food was all prepared by the students and recipe booklets, one called *Food Fit for*

a Sheik, were given out. At Liverpool the participants learned something of the Arab monetary system by paying for their food with fake dinars.

In previous years when resource people were available, immersion days have included guest speakers who showed slides of their travels in the lands being studied; assemblies with folk dancers; and native speakers showing artifacts from their countries and explaining their traditions. Teachers believe the key to a good immersion day is to draw on all the resources possible to provide a wide variety of experiences for the youngsters who participate.

LOOKING BACK

After a total immersion day students are asked to complete questionnaires about the day, on the basis of which the next year's immersion day is planned. Generally students like the bazaar and the game activities better than some of the more academic pursuits, but most students feel they learn something from the classroom lessons and the documentary.

One measure of student interest is the enthusiasm the sixth graders bring to the project from the first day of school. Many students' older siblings or friends tell the sixth graders about their own experiences in previous immersion days. Naturally the younger students look forward to an event which has peer recommendation.

In evaluating immersion days, teachers seem to agree that their value is two-fold. First, there is the value of the preparatory work which students do prior to the day itself. The student projects provide useful experience in independent work and task-oriented study. The research and study needed for participation in a documentary or in a game like "To Tell the Truth" is undertaken more enthusiastically by the children, becuase they know they will be using their knowledge. They also learn the necessity of cooperation and team spirit in completing group projects.

The immersion day itself seems to have value for the students primarily as a chance to have new experiences. Students learn new skills, gain ideas from the projects, experience different styles of clothing, and taste unusual food. These experiences offer the students insight into a foreign culture and foster appreciation for a way of life different from their own.

Although teachers readily concur that immersion days are time-consuming, demanding heavy staff input, they believe the effort is worthwhile. When asked what advice they would give to other teachers who might wish to hold immersion days, the teachers from both schools came up with nearly identical thoughts:

First, start at least two months ahead to plan the immersion day. The amount of time it takes to organize all the details of a program involving 300 students is amazing, and it can't be rushed. Also, Schnieder suggests that during the two months of preparation no other major projects should be undertaken. Last year at Liverpool they did a special election project while preparing for Middle East Day, and the enthusiasm for both projects was diminished.

Second, in order to be a success the immersion day must be very well organized, and there must be a true team effort. Arranging class schedules and finding enough building space posed the most frustrating problems. Without the cooperation of the ertire school, these arrangements would be impossible to make.

And the third bit of advice is plain and simple--Get a good night's sleep before the immersion day. You'll need it.

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 073 922 - **The Middle East.** Grade Nine. Resource Unit (Unit VI). 211 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$9.87. This resource unit provides an area study on the Middle East. Objectives, content, teaching strategies, and suggested resource materials are included.

ED 073 960 - **Arab World. Political and Diplomat tory 1900-1967: A Chronological Study.** A descriptive brochure. 40 pp. MF-$.65. Hardcopy available from NCR/Microcard Editions, 901 26th St., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20037, free. This brochure contains descriptive introductory materials on the Arab world. It would be most useful as a teacher resource.

ED 073 012 - **Materials and Activities for Teachers and Children (MATCH).** Program Report. 30 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. The MATCH materials are self-contained media kits which involve students directly in the learning process. Emphasis is on the examination of real objects and an in-depth study of the topic. Topics available include **The City, A House of Ancient Greece,** and **The Japanese Family.** Additional topics are forthcoming.

ED 072 898 - **Agrarian Reform Policies and Development in the Arab Middle East.** 11 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. This paper would be a useful resource to teachers teaching about the Middle East, as it provides background on the nature, scope, and implications of the development of rural areas in the Middle East.

For further information, write.

William Fetsko
Social Studies Consultant
Liverpool School District
Liverpool, New York 10388

Read:

Social Studies Grade 6: A Teaching System, Eastern Europe. Available from The University of the State of New York/The State Education Department, Bureau of Elementary Curriculum Development, Albany, N.Y. 12224. The content, a suggested methodology, a list of learning activities, and a multimedia bibliography for teaching Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are set forth in this curriculum guide.

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